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SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XOX
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CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
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COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO FOR ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

11. Hizballah-IDF Clashes

12. Mideast

Key stories in the media:

Maariv and Israel Radio reported that last night, for the first time since the disengagement, the IDF made an incursion into the Beit Lahiya area of the northern Gaza Strip. Electronic media and leading news websites reported that today, at least seven Palestinian gunmen were killed in a number of raids early Tuesday in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Leading media reported that on Monday, the IDF thwarted a suicide bombing in Jerusalem and a terrorist attack by infiltrators from Egypt, one of whom was killed.

Hizballah-IDF clashes dominated the weekend's headlines. On Sunday, the IDF carried out a massive retaliatory strike following Katyusha rocket attacks by Hizballah, in which two IDF soldiers were wounded. The media reported that the fighting ended after on Sunday afternoon, the Lebanese government requested a cease-fire with Israel via the UN. On Monday, Yediot reported that PM Ehud Olmert would ask Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak to convey a tough message to Lebanese PM Fuad Siniora. The Jerusalem Post and other media reported that many Lebanese are increasing pressure on Hizballah to disarm. On Monday, Ha'aretz reported that Iran has transferred to Hizballah rockets capable of reaching Beersheva.

On Sunday, The Jerusalem Post wrote that in recent days The Washington Post and The New York Times expressed skepticism about Olmert's "realignment" plan.

On Monday, Israel Radio quoted political sources in Cairo as saying that Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak would propose to PM Olmert at their meeting next week that Israel transfer to the Palestinians the tax money that Israel collects for the PA. He would also propose that donations collected by Arab countries for the Palestinians be transferred as well.

On Sunday, leading media reported that defense establishment representatives told Justice Minister Haim Ramon late last week that 486 km of the separation fence will be completed by the beginning of 2007. This constitutes 93 percent of the 523-km fence (which does not include some 300km that are awaiting legal rulings).

Ha'aretz quoted a senior GOI minister as saying that the government plans to set aside just a few weeks for talks with the Yesha Council of Jewish Settlements in the Territories for the evacuation of 24 illegal outposts in the West Bank, and that if the sides are unable to reach an agreement, PM Ehud Olmert is likely to order the IDF and police to move in and

evacuate the locations.

Leading media reported that on Monday, Interior Minister Roni Bar-On informed four Hamas legislators from East Jerusalem that they must renounce their membership in the group if they are to continue to have residency rights in Jerusalem.

Yediot reported that on Monday, following talks with FM Tzipi Livni, Turkish PM Recep Tayyip Erdogan invited Olmert to Turkey. Livni was quoted as saying during her visit to Ankara that Israel favors a two-state solution. Yediot quoted Erdogan as saying that the disengagement was a big step, but that Turkey would have preferred a Roadmap-based solution involving two states. The Jerusalem Post reported that Turkish Foreign Ministry spokesman Namik Tan told the newspaper: "Turkey supports a policy that what Iran is doing or developing should be transparent and Tehran must convince the international community that [Iran's nuclear development] is only for peaceful purposes."

On Sunday, Ha'aretz reported that PA Chairman [President] Mahmoud Abbas intends to expand the Presidential Guard directly under his authority with thousands of new members, with the ultimate goal of a 10,000-strong force.

Major media (banners in Yediot and Maariv) reported that at the cabinet today, Defense Minister Amir Peretz may vote against the government's proposal to make a 1 billion shekel (around USD 221 million) cut in the defense budget -- including 500 million shekels from Defense Ministry funds. Ha'aretz quoted Peretz associates as saying that officials at the Prime Minister's Office are acting against Peretz.

All media reported that on Monday, NAFTHE, the largest union of university teachers in the UK, adopted a resolution encouraging an academic boycott of Israel. Ha'aretz quoted Education Minister Yuli Tamir as saying that the boycott has marginal support and that the British mainstream actually views Israel as a partner. The Jerusalem Post and Hatzofe reported that the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office Minister Lord Triesman condemned NAFTHE's resolution.

All media reported that on Monday, the daughter of Palestinian PM Ismail Haniyeh was briefly detained for entering Israel with false documents. She was on her way to visit her jailed fiance.

Citing the White House's belief that the UN Security Council will not vote for sanctions against Iran, Yediot reported that the US administration has decided to form, together with Japan and European states, a plan that would impose economic sanctions on Iran.

The Jerusalem Post reported that Israel announced Monday that the Israel Navy would for the first time participate in a summertime exercise with NATO in the face of the growing Iranian threat to obtain nuclear power. Israeli Navy missile boats will take part in the Black Sea drill, dubbed "Cooperation Mako."

The Jerusalem Post reported that despite assurances given last week in testimony to the US Senate's Finance Committee by US Deputy Trade Representative Susan Schwab that Saudi Arabia had told Washington it was abiding by its pledge to end the boycott of Israel, it continues to prohibit Israeli-made goods from entering Saudi territory.

The Jerusalem Post reported that a petition calling for the GOI to stamp out the practice of human trafficking has been signed by more than 3,000 Jews worldwide and will be brought before PM Olmert this week to coincide with the release of the State Department's annual Trafficking in Persons report on June 1.

The Jerusalem Post quoted Tel Aviv University President as saying Monday that the University's Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies will be folded into the new Institute for National Strategy and Policy established by Australian billionaire Frank Lowy. The newspaper reported that former US Ambassador to Israel Martin Indyk will be deputy chairman at the Institute's governing board.

On Sunday, Maariv's online service NRG quoted Father Elias Shakur, the Greek-Catholic Bishop in Israel, as saying that screening the movie "The Da Vinci Code" in Israel is worse than an attempt early this year to set the Church of the Annunciation on fire and it is liable to worsen relations between Christians and Jews in Israel.

On Sunday, Ha'aretz reported that the British newspaper The Financial Times selected the Ha'aretz journalist Akiva Eldar as the most influential commentator in Israel.

Globes and other media reported that Indonesia's Sampoerna Group of Companies will buy 20 percent of the Israeli insurance group Harel at a value of USD 900 million, and will eventually own 26 percent of the Israeli group. The Sampoerna family is one of the richest in Southeast Asia.

11. Hizbulah-IDF Clashes:

Summary:

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "Blaming the aggressor is a novel strategy, but it's worth a try, and it might just work."

Block Quotes:

"Blame the Aggressor"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (5/30): "Let there be no illusions: The modus operandi of Hizbulah, Syria and Iran depends on the continued hope that some stray Israeli missile will create a situation that has occurred many times in the past -- in which these forces can not only attack Israel and get away with it, but can heap international opprobrium on Israel in the bargain. The Security Council, of course, has in the past been pivotal in this strategy, since it could be relied upon to condemn Israeli responses while ignoring the aggression that precipitated them. Lately, the ability of rogues and terrorists to rely on the UN to blame the victim has been reduced in the sense that now it is more common to criticize 'both sides' and issue a global call for 'restraint,' thereby merely treating aggressor and victim as equals. What is yet to happen, however, is for the international community to blame the aggressor and show unequivocal solidarity with the victim, such as in the resolutions condemning the 9/11 attack on the United States. Blaming the aggressor is a novel strategy, but it's worth a try, and it might just work."

12. Mideast:

Summary:

Senior op-ed writer Akiva Eldar commented in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "The Sharon-Peres government ignored the Arab League's proposal.... The Olmert-Peres government has received ... a second opportunity to reach an agreement. This may be the last opportunity."

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "The Palestinians must choose between their desire for freedom and independence and their desire to destroy Israel. They cannot have both."

Columnist Shlomo Gazit, a former head of IDF Intelligence, wrote in popular, pluralist Ma'ariv: "If it is successful, Abu Mazen's surprising [referendum] initiative ... will turn the Palestinians into a partner with a clear opening position."

Ha'aretz editorialized: "The government of Israel would be well advised to allow its representatives to maintain ongoing contacts with senior Palestinian government officials on practical issues."

Block Quotes:

I. "Between Prisoners and Captives"

Senior op-ed writer Akiva Eldar commented in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (5/29): "The Sharon-

Peres government ignored the Arab League's proposal and preferred a targeted assassination of the Palestinian partner and unilateral moves. The Olmert-Peres government has received from the prisoners, from Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) and from pragmatic groups in the territories a second opportunity to reach an agreement. This may be the last opportunity."

II. "The Limits of the 'Reconciliation' Plan"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (5/29): "The [Palestinian] prisoners' statement does not openly call for the elimination of Israel, but neither does it explicitly recognize the Jewish state, much less explicitly seek accommodation with it.... Even if the Palestinian public were to ratify such a document in a referendum, Hamas and like-minded others would be able to argue that the people had confirmed the principle of a Palestinian state as a basis for continuing war against Israel, rather than ending the war with Israel. Such a referendum might be presented as a step forward for Palestinian unity, but it is hard to see how it would advance the cause of peace. The Palestinians must choose between their desire for freedom and independence and their desire to destroy Israel. They cannot have both. The prisoners' 'reconciliation' document seeks to keep all options open."

III. "A Brilliant Palestinian Ploy"

Columnist Shlomo Gazit, a former head of IDF Intelligence, wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv (5/30): "If it is successful, Abu Mazen's surprising [referendum] initiative ... will turn the Palestinians into a partner with a clear opening position. The new Israeli defensive position complains that the compromise document that [Fatah leader Marwan] Barghouti drafted in prison is unacceptable to Israel. Without doubt, this is true. But we need to bear in mind that it is inconceivable that the opening positions of the Palestinians before beginning negotiations should conform to Israel's positions, since that is precisely why and over what negotiations are held. Moreover, we are still a long way away from being able to determine whether it will be possible -- even with exceptional good will on both sides -- to reach an understanding and an agreement. The failure of the talks will not be, therefore, the result of there being 'no partner.' We will then face a new problem. We are going to have to work very hard to prove that the impasse that has evolved stems from the Palestinian positions and not Israel's."

IV. "Contacts With Hamas"

Ha'aretz editorialized (5/30): "The attitude of the Israeli government was and remains a total rejection of all ties with the Palestinian government, except for 'humanitarian purposes,' such as the transfer of funds for medicine.... It is clear, however, that residents of the territories and Gaza are suffering the most from this. Moreover, it turns out that the siege on the Hamas government is not weakening it -- at least not for now. On the contrary, it is boosting support for it. Despite the severe suffering in Gaza, there have been no protest actions or demonstrations against the Hamas government there. Furthermore, cooperation on practical issues is no less important to Israel than it is to the Palestinian side.... Such cooperation could help gradually normalize Israel's relations with the Palestinian public and its leaders. On this backdrop, the government of Israel would be well advised to allow its representatives to maintain ongoing contacts with senior Palestinian government officials on practical issues such as water, electricity, health and tourism, the promotion of which could help improve the atmosphere and relations between the two sides."